

University of Dundee

Turning Around a Medical Education Conference

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Medical Education Adaptations: Really Good Stuff for Educational Transition during a Pandemic

Turning Around a Medical Education Conference: Ottawa2020 in the time of Covid-19

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(1) **What problem was addressed?** This should help the reader understand the issue in a manner that makes the extent of the problem clear and offers enough context to enable him/her to make a

The Ottawa2020 Conference on the Assessment of Health Professionals and Evaluation of Programmes was held from 29 February to 4 March 2020 in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, co-organised by AMEE and International Medical University. Between late January and early February 2020, reports of the spread of Covid-19 cases led to concerns about its impact on Ottawa2020. By mid-February 10% of participants, many of whom were presenters, had withdrawn from the conference due to either personal reasons, work or travel restrictions. The potential impact of further participant withdrawals on the programme and on scholarly engagement was of major concern to the organisers, as was the ability to provide a safe and welcoming environment for participants.

judgment about the applicability of the concerns to their own setting.

(2) **What was tried?** This should outline the attempted solution in terms of how it was built to fit the context of the problem, what resources were required, and how the idea was given a chance to succeed over the long term.

Following a risk assessment, a decision was taken not to postpone or cancel Ottawa2020. All possible steps were taken to safeguard the wellbeing of attendees, based on WHO guidelines February 2020¹ and advisory from the Ministry of Health Malaysia. A needs assessment informed the transformation to a “blended conference”, with a mix of face-to-face and online content to support those attending onsite and those participating at a distance. Limited resources, in particular the fifteen day timeline to transform the event, were major considerations. Additional roles and responsibilities were identified and a streaming service provider was engaged to live stream all plenaries and symposia to registered participants. Key speakers unable to attend were able to either present live or to send a recorded presentation and join a live question and answer session with both onsite and online participants, the latter monitored by an onsite moderator. Participants with oral presentations were able to send videos, and poster presenters could submit pdfs with QR codes for subsequent contact. Technologies appropriate for the context were selected, detailed instructions for moderators, speakers and participants were communicated, and a plan for a post-conference repository was formulated. Almost 700 attended the conference in person. For each of the streamed sessions, online participation ranged from 50 to 95. Whilst both onsite and online participants generally evaluated the conference well, a number of online participants requested for more online moderators to improve engagement. The streaming and repository were appreciated by many.

- (3) **What lessons were learned?** This should be the main focus of the report, through which authors are asked to share their successes and failures and to highlight how their perspective has changed regarding why the innovation met with success (or did not).

Whether resulting from Covid-19 crisis, natural disaster, economic downturn or growing recognition of the need for sustainability, the form of participation in conferences and meetings is changing, and adaptability on the part of organisers, presenters and participants is needed. The lessons learned from Ottawa2020 include

- A blended conference can be designed to meet the needs of both onsite and online participants.
- Moderators should ensure that online participants feel connected, through the opportunity to comment and ask questions.
- The AV/IT resources needed including adequate wifi bandwidth, equipment, technical support and pre-tests add significantly to the budget.
- Presentations done remotely may be pre-recorded but value is added by providing live question and answer sessions with the speakers via audio or online chats.
- Time zones provide an added challenge for both online presenters and participants hence a conference repository is important.
- Technical support and clear instructions for both onsite and online speakers and participants are needed.
- The informal community building that takes place outside the formal sessions is a limitation for online participants.
- The collegiality and moral support from onsite and online participants was a significant factor in the success of Ottawa2020.

References (maximum of one):

1 World Health Organization. (2020). Key planning recommendations for mass gatherings in the context of the current COVID-19 outbreak: Interim guidance, 14 February 2020. World Health Organization. <https://apps.who.int/iris/handle/10665/331004>

Website (maximum of one, for use if the educational materials described are publicly available):

<http://ottawa2020.org/>

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